

Be Not Drunk with Wine, Part 3

Ephesians 5:18

We're studying the book of Ephesians and having a wonderful time doing it. As we've come to the fifth chapter, the eighteenth verse of the worthy walk of the believer, we have stopped for a brief digression because so many people have posed the question, regarding the drinking of wine. In verse 18 we read, "Be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Now we studied that in the context but it raised the question we know we're not supposed to be drunk, we know the Bible forbids us to be drunkards, that is a sin, that is part of our past life, the words of Peter come ringing back, for you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do. He then goes on talking about living in debauchery, drunkenness, orgies, carousings and detestable idolatry, we know that's a part of the past life, we know that drunkenness is a forbidden thing and we know that we are to be filled with the Spirit. But the question that arises is this; we agree that drunkenness is a sin but what about drinking wine at all. What is to be the Christian's position in regard to drinking alcoholic beverages? Since this is such a major issue today and such a current, needed discussion, we have digressed from the text itself to discuss that very issue. Should a Christian drink or what does the Bible say about the Christian and alcoholic beverages?

Now you'll remember that we tried to share with you last time some principles that we have to use as checkpoints in this discussion. The Bible does not say you cannot drink wine. I told you last time if it did, I'd read the verse and we'd go home. It doesn't say that. And so we have to get some other principles to determine whether it's right or wrong and if it is, when it is and when it isn't and so forth. Should a Christian drink alcoholic beverages? This is a very important issue. 81% of the Catholics and 64% of the Protestants in America now drink alcoholic beverages. So if the word of God has something to say about it there then should be a wide audience of people out there listening.

Now we told you there would be 8 principles or checkpoints we need to pass through to arrive at an answer. We went through the first two last time. Let me remind you of them.

The first question we asked was Is it the same? In other words is the wine today the same as the wine consumed in Bible times? And the reason we need to deal with that issue is because people will invariably say, that is Christian people, if they drink wine or alcoholic beverages-that they did it in Bible times. So if they did it in Bible times, Old Testament times, New Testament times then it's certainly alright to do it today. So the question is, is the drinking of the Bible times the same as today, was the product the same, was the wine the same? We went into that in great detail last Sunday and we found the answer was no. The wine consumed in Bible times was not

the same 9 to 11% alcoholic content that people drink today. I shared with you that there were 3 kinds of wine; really, there was the glukos, which had to do with the new wine, fresh wine.

The Old Testament word is tirosh, and that would be very much like grape juice, of course, it could ferment very rapidly and so it could cause drunkenness so it was mixed with water and the lowest dilution would be 3 parts of water with 1 part wine, reducing any alcoholic content to a very low, negligible alcoholic percentage so it wouldn't be classified as an alcoholic drink, you would have to sit there and drink and drink and drink and drink until you were bloated to get drunk. Then there was oinos that word is simply wine in general and it's liquid form and we saw that wine was always mixed with water. In the new testament the normal wine that stood for a long time in a large container would then be mixed with water as high as 10 to 15 parts to 1, as low as 3 parts to 1 so that it would not present an alcoholic content and cause drunkenness. You had the fresh wine which was also mixed with water, you had the fermented wine which was also mixed with water and then you had that wine that was a thick boiled paste. They would take the new wine; boil it evaporating all the water, killing all the bacteria, consequently it could not ferment, storing it in wine skins, then when they wanted to drink it, they would squeeze it out, it would come out like a thick paste honey, mix it again with water. Plyme, the Roman historian said as much as 20 parts to 1 because it was a thick concentrate and drink it at that point and then it would be unfermented.

So the wine of the Bible was either the unfermented, pasty grape mixed with water or it was mixed with water from a liquid base. The straight stuff as we know it today with a 9 to 11% alcohol content would be classified as shakar in the old testament, sikera in the new. It can be translated strong drink. We showed you that both the historians, pagans and the Scriptures saw it as a barbarian drink. So that straight wine as we know it today, with a 9 to 11% alcohol content was not consumed as the norm by the people of the Bible to say nothing of the other liquor today which is from 15% to 50% alcohol which is the content of a 100 proof. So it was different and we have to make that statement because we don't want to base our drinking today on the Bible people drinking if it were not the same.

The second question we asked, the second checkpoint, not only is it the same, is it necessary? We pointed out for that most people in the Old Testament, it was sort of necessary for them to drink wine, they had little choice between water, milk from a goat or a cow and wine. There may have been some other things they concocted but basically that was about it and, normally it was pretty necessary to drink wine of some sorts. As I say, it was diluted for the normal course of life and if you wanted to drink strong drink just to get drunk or as a sedative for some severe illness. But in the Bible day they had a problem with choice, they had a limited amount of choices. But today we don't have that problem, so we would say, secondly, is it necessary. The answer is no, it is not necessary to drink wine. It then falls into the category of an option, it falls into the category of a preference, it falls into the category of a want. I've heard some people say, "Well, I just like the taste of it," That's fine, that's a like or a preference or want but not a necessity. We are not like some cultures and, by the way, there may be some people in some cultures of the

world who will listen to this tape and in their particular situation they are very limited, they just have no choice whatsoever.

Now under a certain circumstance at a certain point of time it may be a different case but in our society for the most part, clear around the world it is no necessary thing. I would venture to say that every place I've been, every language, every culture and in every climate, somewhere there is Coca Cola. And in addition to Coca Cola even in the Arab countries right out in the middle of the pyramids, there was a guy selling soda pop. You had to check out your soda pop to see what was swimming in it but nonetheless it was soda pop.

So it really isn't a necessity today. We have sophistication in terms of producing drinks; we have refrigeration and things like that to bypass fermentation. We're not in the same category. So first question then, is it the same? No. Second question, is it necessary? No. So we come to the fact that it is a choice. You choose to drink because you choose to drink. It's a choice and people will say, "Well, I have liberty in Christ, I'm free, all things are lawful it says in [I Cor. 6:12](#), all things are lawful, I'm not bound, I'm not under the Law, food is no more sacred, there are no more clean and the unclean food, Acts chapter 10, Romans chapter 14, so there's no need for me to fear my drinking. My liberty allows me that prerogative. So it is a choice so I may choose or not to choose." Let me ask you the third question then, is it the best choice?

Is it the best choice? There are a lot of things that are a choice. The Bible doesn't say you can't stick leaves in your mouth and light them on fire. The Bible doesn't say that. If you want to put leaves in your mouth and light them on fire and blow smoke through your nose, you have a right to do that. It is not forbidden in the Bible. Of course somebody said if God meant you to smoke He would have built you with a chimney. That may not be true but that is not forbidden in the Bible. It's a choice you make and some people tell you that's not the best choice. You have a choice to drink coffee or not to drink coffee so some people think coffee is wonderful some people think the caffeine has a negative effect and it might not be the best choice although you have the liberty to drink coffee, burn plants in your mouth and also to drink wine if you choose that liberty. So it a matter of choice but is it the best choice? And let's deal in that category for a minute. I want to show you some progression of biblical truths to help you to see the best choice, alright? Let's go back to Leviticus chapter 10. I think you'll find this to be fascinating, provided I can keep you alerted to it.

Now in God's basic economy in Israel, there was a separation among the people. There were higher standards for people with greater responsibilities. I don't know if you really know that but it's true. That can be illustrated a lot of ways, take for example a sin offering. Remember certain people had to come, well everybody had to come and make a sin offering, but if it were a sin of the congregation it would be a bullock, if it were a sin of the high priest it would be a bullock, if it were the sin of a ruler it would be a male goat, if it were a sin of only a lay individual it could be two turtle doves, it could be a young pigeon, it could even be flour.

In other words, it seems the higher you go the higher the requirement for a sacrifice. The higher the theocratic rank the more costly was the offering. And since the congregation itself was a priestly nation it needed to have an offering that was equivalent of a high priest. The high priest had to give the highest offering, a bullock. Under him the rulers had to give a goat under them the people could give doves and things like that cause the higher the rank the more serious the responsibility and the greater the guilt. You see, that's what it says in [James 3:1](#), stop being so many teachers for theirs is the greater condemnation. That's the reason the Lord, said, "Too much is given, too much is required." The higher the theocratic rank the higher the responsibility and consequently the more severe the sin. The sin bears more guilt the higher the position. Because when you sin in a high position its ramifications are far reaching, aren't they? A sin on the part of a high priest or a ruler or king had a tremendous response among the people, far reaching. So it is by God's standard.

Now God has established standards for His people but in Old Testament times He called certain people above those standards and He said I'm setting a higher standard for you. The first illustration of that is Leviticus 10 verse 8, God is giving the requirements for the priesthood here and they're most interesting. He says to Aaron-who was a high priest, "Do not drink wine or strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die."

Now that's a pretty strong requirement, no wine or strong drink, now do you see what's happening? Whereas the people drank wine which was mixed with water or the paste out of the wineskin, where the people would drink this and some profligate people who would even drink strong drink, the priests were called to a higher level. You are not to do this ... When you enter into the tabernacle of the congregation or you'll die and this shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that you may put difference between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean. In other words you are called apart to a separation, consecration to a higher level of devotion, to a higher level of commitment to God. And some commentators say that it has to do only when they ministered in the tabernacle, only when they ministered to the Lord and some say it has to do with their whole life long. Well either way the point is when they did minister for the Lord, they were called to minister to God and they had to be totally abstainers. Why? Lest their judgment or their priestly functions be clouded taking in any alcoholic drink. God wanted their minds clean and clear and pure. So they were forbidden to do that as if God were elevating them to another standard, another level above the people.

Proverbs 31, last chapter of the book in verse 4, and here you see the same standard again not only for the priests but for the kings and the princes. Verse 4 of Proverbs 31 says, "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink." Why? "Lest they drink, and forget the law and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted." In other words, not only were the priests called to an abstaining position but so were the kings and the princes. God did not want their judgment clouded. God did not want their thinking fuzzy or hazy. God wanted them set apart. God wanted them consecrated. God wanted them apart and different from the

people. And verse 6 says if you're going to give strong drink to somebody, strong drink should be given only to people ready to perish. In other words anybody else drinking it was barbaric. Strong drink which would be the straight unmixed wine should be given to somebody who is perishing. In other words, as a sedative for someone in pain of death.

Now the wine which was the normal wine, mixed, should be given to those with heavy hearts. Let them drink and forget their poverty and their misery. Let the warmth and the joy that comes from the wine be for those with problems, with deep problems or let the strong drink for those who are dying but for kings or princes or priests, if we can add Leviticus to that thought, be total abstainers. So there was a level of consecration in the leadership which demanded a higher standard.

Now let's look at Numbers chapter 6 and I'll show you that not only the kings and the princes and the priests and the high priests but there were certain people in the congregation of Israel that chose this standard too. Anybody could choose to step up to this standard, this was the highest standard. And you'll remember in Numbers chapter 6, verse 1, "The Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to the children of Israel and say unto them, when either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the Lord."

Now stop there for a minute. Anybody in the congregation of Israel could say, "I want to consecrate my whole life to God, I want to devote my whole life to the Lord, I want to set myself apart unto God, I want to say 'no' to the things of this life and 'yes' to the things of God, I want to be different, I want to be consecrated." So God said I hereby institute the highest act of consecration and it is called a Nazarite vow and it comes to us from the word nazir. And nazir means the consecrated one. A Nazarite is a consecrated one. In fact the Greek equivalent nazar means holiness or devotion. So when a Jew wanted to come apart and really commit himself, you know we talk about dedicating your life to God after you become a Christian, taking that second step, committing yourself and consecrating, well that's a Nazarite vow. The Nazarite would take a vow of separation.

The end of verse 2 says it. "To separate themselves unto the Lord." A vow of holiness, a vow of consecration to come apart. And what would be the character of it, verse 3, "He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes nor eat moist grapes or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head." So there was the Nazarite vow. You don't cut your hair and you don't touch any wine. The highest level of consecration involved abstinence. It was as if they were stepping up to another level, and identifying with the kings and the princes and the priests and those who were set apart most unto God.

Now, they could take a Nazarite vow for 30 days, 60 days, 90 days or even for life. And there were three people in the Bible who were Nazarites for life, Samuel, Samson and John the Baptist. And it's most fascinating, not only were they Nazarites for life but in the case of Samuel and Samson, both of their mothers, when their mothers were told by God they were going to have them for sons had the same vow of abstinence. I'm sure it wouldn't be just to avoid the alcoholic poisoning of the infant rather it was that same level of consecration. Hannah says that she drank neither wine nor strong drink in [I Samuel 1:14 & 15](#) and the wife of Manoah, the mother of Samson says the same thing, the angel came to her and said you're neither to drink wine or strong drink even as the child you're bearing. So here, for special times whether priests or kings or princes or Judges like Samson or great men of God like Samuel or as great men of God as the prophet John the Baptist there was another level of consecration another level of devotion, a higher vow than was asked of the common people. And by the way, this was not simply common to those leaders. Anybody could do that and there were many Nazarites in Israel. I don't think we realize that but we really don't know how many there were but that there were many.

For example, in Amos chapter 2 it says in verse 11, "God says and I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? Thus saith the Lord". In other words, God says I raised up prophets and I also raised up Nazarites. I raised up some that were set apart, some who took a higher vow, some who had a higher standard of life among you. And of course he goes on to say how they had corrupted them. Amos says to the people, "But you gave the Nazarites wine to drink and you commanded the prophets saying, Prophecy not." They desecrated those Nazarites, those who God had set apart and consecrated to Himself by total abstinence the people of God had actually desecrated and they gave them wine. Back in Judges chapter 13 and verse 4 we read the statement regarding the mother of Samson, just so you'll know where it is. She says, "I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing. For lo, thou shalt conceive." Then in verse 7 the last part of verse 7, "for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death."

Now it seems to me that many of these in Amos 2, that God had established as Nazarites may well have been Nazarites for life who were desecrated or really forced or enticed into disobedience by the rest of the people. So God has established this vow of consecration and there were many people who took it.

I want you to notice Lamentations chapter 4, verse 7 because this goes right along with it. By the time you get to Jeremiah's day, and Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, the Nazarites have been corrupted. God established this beautiful vow, this wonderful act of consecration and as time goes on it corrupts more and more and you find a tremendous statement in Lamentations right after the book of Jeremiah, chapter 4 verse 7.

Listen to what it says, "Her Nazarites" now versions will say nobles or leaders or rulers but the Hebrew is Nazarites, "Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they

were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire." Now there's something about abstaining and something about Nazarites devoted to God that had a result in your own life. You looked different, apparently, it did something for you. And here were these tremendous Nazarites, purer than snow, whiter than milk, more ruddy in body than rubies; their polishing was like sapphire but what happened? As they were desecrated and as they were tempted and as they fell as the people enticed them their visage became blacker than coal, they are not known in the streets anymore, you can't tell them from the people, their skin clings to their bones, it is withered and they become like a stick. They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger. In other words the Nazarites had become destitute and put down and put out, stricken and so forth. What an amazing thing.

God had established this high vow and He had raised up people to live at this level, priests, kings rulers and special prophets and judges and special men like Samson and others that he had lifted to that level and for some strange reason people felt they needed. to pull them down to their level. You know it's a funny thing about people, instead of attaining the highest level they want to grab the people at the highest level and yank them down to their level. That's what happened in Israel. And Jeremiah, bless his heart, when he saw what was going on with that, God used him to speak on that issue and he said to Judah, "You're disobedient, Judah".

In chapter 35 of Jeremiah he said you're disobedient; let me give you a contrast. In chapter 35 of Jeremiah he says, do you remember the Rechabites? The Rechabites the son of Jonadab? Do you remember that Jonadab said to the Rechabites you will neither drink wine or strong drink, you, your sons, your daughters, your wives or anybody in your family forever. In other words, a whole family took the vow of abstinence. The whole family stepped up to the highest level and God says when I even put bowls of wine in front of the Rechabites, they wouldn't drink it. Jeremiah 35, verses 2 to 6. I put bowls of wine in front of them and they wouldn't drink it and he goes all the way through that chapter and he finally sums up in saying, look at the temptations they had to drink wine and they never broke their temptations but you have been disobedient to me. You have been disobedient to me. Here was a group of people who were obedient and they were contrasted with disobedient Israel and the point of their obedience was total abstinence. They had taken that level and God, used them as exemplary.

Now when you come to the new testament you find it in Luke chapter 1, verse 15, most interesting, Zacharias and Elizabeth are told by an angel they're going to have a son in verse 13, he's going to cause them great joy and gladness, many people are going to rejoice at his birth and verse 15 of Luke 1 says, "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink but he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb."

Now here's the greatest man who ever lived. Jesus said in [Matthew 11:11](#), the greatest man who ever lived is John the Baptist, the greatest man who ever lived, was a total abstainer all his life. You see, there's a level, there's a higher level than just the common that God has lifted certain people to this level. The greatest man who ever lived. Now you say, "What does that have to do

with me?" Well by implication a lot of things. When you come to the New Testament and you hear the words of Peter, he says this, You are kings and priests. Every Christian is a king, every Christian is a priest. When you come again to [Matthew 11:11](#), Jesus said "The greatest man born among men is John the Baptist; nevertheless he that is least in My kingdom is greater than he." From now on, we're all at the level of John the Baptist, we're all kings and we're all priests and from now on we're all to be separated unto God, we're all to be consecrated.

[II Cor. 6:17](#), "Come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing." [II Cor. 7:1](#), "Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We're all called to the highest level; we're all elevated to make the best choices. When you come in to the New Testament, beloved. I don't believe the standard changes, I really don't. You know people say, "Priests couldn't drink and kings couldn't drink and princes couldn't drink and the judges couldn't drink that were consecrated to God and all these people, the Rechabites didn't do it and all the Nazarites that took the vow didn't do it but when you get to the old testament, everyone can do it. I don't think in the new testament God lowered His standard. To show you that look at I Tim. chapter 3, now here are the leaders of the church, this is the standard for those who lead in the church. I Tim. 3, if a man desire the office of a bishop, the bishop is synonymous with elder or pastor it just means a leader in the church. If a man is to be a leader in the church, he desires a good thing and he must be blameless. Blameless in what areas? Well, he lists a lot of them, a one woman man, the husband of one wife, means a one woman man totally in love with his wife, temperate, sober minded, of good behavior, given to hospitality, skillful in teaching and watch verse 3, not given to wine.

Now I've kind of changed my thinking on this because I got into it in depth this week and I really studied these terms here in the Greek. And it's a very interesting thing, the verb in this section is the verb to-be, *on*, the verb to-be, it is a state of being that he is talking about. And he uses a particle for you Greek students, the particle is *dei* and *dei* is a particle used to speak of logical necessity rather than moral ought. In other words, it is a logical necessity that these things follow, if a man desires the office of bishop it is logically necessary to do this. It is not the morality that's the issue it's the logic of it. And one logical thing for a man who is a leader is that he is not given to wine and that is all just one word. *me*, which is not, the negative and then the word is *para*, he is not *para*. It does not translate given to wine; it translates beside wine, *para*, *para* being beside. Now watch, it is logically necessary that one who is desiring to be an elder be in a state of not being beside wine. That's what it is saying, that is the literal Greek. What it says to me is that an elder in the church shouldn't drink wine; he shouldn't be beside it, not to be tempted by it, not to be enticed by it. I don't think God lowers His standard; he is not to be along side wine. You say, "Well, don't you think it just means he's not to be given to too much of it?" No, it doesn't say that, it says he is not to be beside wine. Why?

Listen if a priest was to be clear minded at all times and never give himself the possibility to be tempted, if it was true for a king, if it was true for a prince, if it was true for a judge, if it was true for a great leader like Samuel, if it was true for a prophet like John the Baptist is it any lower of a

standard for those who rule in the church of Jesus Christ which He purchased with His own precious blood? Should it be any less? And by the way, let me show you why I'm convinced that this means that he is to follow the same standard as the old testament, you go down to verse 8 and watch this is very interesting. In verse 8 it says, now he's talking about deacons and deacons do not rule, deacons serve. Deacons don't make decisions, they don't rule they just serve but how interesting it says of a deacon, "In like manner must a deacon be serious, not double-tongued, not given to much wine."

Now there you find the word much, the point was this, an elder had none, a deacon was allowed some in moderation. Why? Because he did not have to make decisions. He was not a mediator, moderator, arbitrator, judge, discerner, leader, there's a big difference. And by the way, he has to mean something different because the whole phraseology in verse 8 is different. He doesn't even use the word paroinon; he uses a completely different verb, a completely different form of the noun, a completely different addition of the word pollo, which means much. It literally says that he is not attached too much wine. The point being this, if he meant the same thing in both cases he would have used the same phrase. But when he uses different phrases, he has different things in mind. And I'm convinced that the thrust of what he is saying here is elders follow in the continuity of all God's leaders, all those who sought the highest level whereas deacons, of course not being in that absolute position of decision making and being the agents of God to lead the church would have a standard somewhat lower. Now remember this doesn't mean if you're a deacon now you can go out and whoop it up, remember that even the wine that those deacons drank was wine mixed with water again with a very low alcoholic content.

I don't know how else to explain the disparity in the two statements, the disparity in the two Greek phrases then to say paroinon means that he was not to be beside wine period. Do you see the point? And I thank God that the elders of Grace Church have taken this commitment that it is a logical necessity that they not drink wine at all. This is something they decided years ago to set the highest standard of God's leadership and that's the way it is with the elders here and I thank God for that. Well, the point is this, people, for certain functions and for certain areas of responsibility in categories of ministry, God required total abstinence. That was for the highest and the best and really all throughout history, anyone who desired could come up to that level if they choose to. Anybody could be consecrated as a Nazarite. You find even in Acts 21, a group of people going to the temple and doing that, you find Paul doing that. In fact if you want to know something interesting look at I Timothy chapter 5, verse 23, "And Paul says to Timothy, drink no longer water but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities". Why does he tell him that? You know why, I'm convinced the only way that verse makes sense is if Timothy didn't normally drink wine. If Timothy normally drank wine, Paul wouldn't have to say that, but if Timothy was in the habit of abstaining and drinking water, Paul says go ahead and take a little bit for the medicinal purposes it rendered. And so it seems to me that it is very well possible that Timothy had taken himself to that level of commitment as leader in the church of Jesus Christ.

What I'm saying is this, there's a high standard in the Bible for those in spiritual leadership and that to me is the best choice. You know if we're all kings, we're all priests, if we're all those who were set apart from God as consecrated by the Holy Spirit, if we're all, [Romans 12:1](#), to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, if we are all to come as a burnt offering, offering ourselves in total consecration as an act of natural and normal worship, then it seems to me that all of us could well consider making the best and the highest choice.

So, we ask - is it the same? No. Is it necessary? No is it the best choice? Well, perhaps not. Maybe the best choice is to stand with those who came apart in the Old Testament and in the new and in the church today, those who lead.

Let's ask a fourth question. If we're going to drink alcoholic beverages, we ought to face the question - Is it habit forming? Now this is a tough issue because a lot of things are habit forming. You say, "I put my sock on my left foot everyday before my right foot." That's habit forming because I've been doing it so long and it doesn't hurt me. Implied in the idea of habit forming is a habit which creates a negative response. This takes us to [I Cor. 6:12](#), and I quoted it in part a moment ago but this is what it says, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." And the literal English meaning comes from the word foot, which you get the little letters ped, which means all things do not free my feet. In other words, there are things I could do but they'll tangle up my feet, they'll trip me up, they'll tie me down. All things are permissible but they will hinder me, some will entangle me. And one of the things alcohol does, although they may say well I have the liberty, I have the freedom to do that, we may find that in using that freedom it may become an entanglement because at the end of the verse it says, "All things are lawful for me but I will not be brought under the power of any". Alcohol has the ability to tangle you up in your feet, and that's for sure, you ought to see peoples feet when they're drunk they're very tangled up but more than that it brings you under the power of some other influence. It creates a dependency, a habit that can cause an overpowering of your own choice making and thinking processes.

And I guess I come down to this issue. I want to avoid sin, right? And I think you do to, I really do. If I think something is really a sin I know in my heart I want to avoid that. But I would go a step further and say I want to avoid those things which potentiate sin. Why should I expose myself to something that could potentiate sin. I feel the same way with food. Gluttony is a sin and if I don't know how to handle food I could get into a lot of problems, now I don't have much choice about eating food, I've got to eat food, it's not like drinking wine in that sense but you know what I like to do? I like to vary my eating and sometimes abstain totally from food on a somewhat regular basis just so that I am in control of what I eat, so it isn't controlling me. And I think that's a very basic thing in the Christian life. We never want to get under the control and the power of things that are ungodly influences that are things that could cause us to fall into sin. So I would say the safest line is to avoid sin and also that which can potentiate sinfulness.

The people at the Alcohol Institute said that alcohol is habit forming because it has the ability to attack the brain and create that dependency and we all know about that. Now some people can do it and it doesn't become a habit but it does have that potential, it can become a habit. So we have to answer the question, is it habit forming with a potential yes it can be. It can form a habit, it can create a dependency, it can tangle up our feet and it can bring us into it's power so that we do things and say things and think things that are not our own thoughts. They are induced in us by the power and the influence of alcohol.

Let's go to a fifth question. If then it is habit forming, is it also potentially destructive? And the answer to that is yes. I have a letter right here in my hands from a dear young lady in our church and I'm not going to take the time to read the whole thing this morning except to say that the contents of the letter, I'll give you just a little thought here, briefly-Last Sunday during the service on [Ephesians 5:18](#). I was compelled to share something with you, my mother on August 15, 1978 in General Hospital in intensive care with a cardiac arrest and respiratory failure, she had sclerosis of the liver, high blood pressure, damaged kidneys and from my own diagnosis a broken heart. Needless to say, my dear mother was an alcoholic. She had been an alcoholic from her late twenties till the day she died at the age of 66.

When I committed my life to Christ surely I had a deep concern for my mother's salvation. I shared the gospel with her many times and she said God couldn't help her because she was an awful person. I would, tell her that God loves her no matter what she was or what she is now but it seemed hopeless to her. When I would talk on the phone or otherwise, sometimes she would ask me to pray for her. She also read the Bible from time to time and was searching for God. Her last days were spent in a cruddy hotel in Los Angeles where she was once beaten up and more than once, robbed. One day she was taken to the hospital for an asthma attack and when I called the hospital they told me she was in a coma. She had had two cardiac arrests and a heart attack. Well, when she was in a coma there was no way to reach her for Jesus so I had allmy friends including Grace Church Emergency Prayer Group to pray that she come out of the coma. The very next day she came out of it, she had a respirator in her mouth to breathe for her and they had a machine moderating her heart rate and some kind of kidney machine on her, it was pitiful. I stayed with her and prayed most of the day and read with her God's love and gift of salvation. She was very restless and didn't seem to know that I was there. She goes on to describe more of the medical factors. I asked her if she believed Jesus Christ was her Savior and that He died for her sins and if she did to squeeze my hand and she squeezed my hand. After that her heart rate started going down and eventually went down to 94 beats per minute and stayed within a few beats of that the whole time. She became more peaceful then and two days later my mom's heart stopped, she died. The alcohol and the kind of life that goes along with it and being an alcoholic is what caused her death. She goes on.

There's no question that we know about that. I don't know exactly what happened in that dear lady's heart before she died. I hope she meant that squeeze, don't you? You know the evils of alcohol and you know that it is potentially destructive. But I want to look at [Ephesians 5:18](#) and

not only know it from a testimony viewpoint but know it from the text. In [Ephesians 5:18](#) there is a little word that is very powerful. You read there, "And be not drunk with wine, in which is excess". That is the word asotia that is a very interesting and important word, asotia, it originally meant to be hopelessly and incurably sick.

Now read the verse that way, Don't be drunk with wine, which leads to be hopelessly, incurably sick. You think God knows that drunkenness can lead to dissipation? Yes. We could say that the literal meaning at the time Paul wrote would be this, an asotia person would be one by his manner of life destroyed himself, one who by his manner of life destroyed himself. Drunkenness leads to incurable, hopeless sickness and destruction. That's right in the Bible. By the way, [Luke 15:13](#) you have this word asotia used, it says a young man went to his father and he said; father, give me everything that I have coming to me and, you remember, he took everything he got and he went into a far country and it says he engaged himself in riotous living, remember that? Riotous living, [Luke 15:13](#) is the word asotia, he debauched himself, he engaged in life which lead to incurable, hopeless sickness, he had a life whose manner was to lead to destruction, a wild undisciplined, debauchery life. There's no question that this word is indicating or saying to us, drunkenness leads to dissipation. Drunkenness leads to destruction. You study it all the way through the Bible and you find this, wine is a mocker and it is raging, it says.

In [Proverbs 4:17](#) it says if you drink wine you find violence accompanying it. You go back in where there is the book of Genesis and you find drunkenness there is immorality, where there is drunkenness, there is incest. You go back into [Deuteronomy 21:20](#) where there is drunkenness, there is gluttony, where there is drunkenness there is rebellion, where there is drunkenness there is disobedience to parents, where there is drunkenness there is a dissolute life. That's where it leads, Be not drunk with wine which produces a hopeless and incurable sickness. The Bible says, people, that it can lead to destruction.

I don't know if you know this but one-fourth of the patients admitted into mental hospitals have an alcoholic problem. It tears the mind to ribbons. We know that physically it produces sclerosis of the liver, obstructed liver causes ballooning, it even causes the ballooning of the veins of the esophagus according to one medical report I read. The thinned out veins are more prone to rupture when food is swallowed and cause a serious and fatal hemorrhage so that when some people who die of this die from having eaten.

Further you'd probably be remiss if you didn't remember that alcohol not only kills the people who drink it but it kills a lot of innocent people who are standing around. You know that in forty-one point - two per-cent (41.2%) of all violent deaths, alcohol is the factor. Nearly half of everybody that dies violently is the result of some alcohol. A study conducted in Delaware indicates that alcohol figures in half of our traffic deaths. In New York City, a joint study made by the State Department of Health and Cornell University revealed that 73% of the drivers responsible for the accidents in which they died had been drinking. In Westchester County, New York blood tests were done on 83 drivers that were killed in single vehicle accidents, the test

revealed that 79% of these drivers were under the influence of liquor. Alcohol is a deadly thing. It leads to excess, asotia, hopeless incurable illness and the book of Proverbs just talks about this over and over and over. Isaiah chapter 28, let me read verse 7, "But they also have erred, through wine and through strong drink are out of the way." The priests and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up with wine, they are out of the way through strong drink, they err in their visions, they stumble in their judgment, their tables are full of vomit and filthiness so that there is no clean place.

So who's left to teach knowledge, who's left to speak for God. It corrupted the priesthood, it corrupted the prophets, that's why, you see, God lifted everybody above that, he wanted their leadership. That's why He elevated those people because it had the potential to lead to a slobbering, sickening, vomiting group of leaders sitting around a table. And so God lifted it and in Joel, God withdrew the right to drink, [Joel 1:5](#), "Awake you drunkards and weep and wail you drinkers of wine because of the new wine for it's cut off from your mouth." God says, "No more drink for you". Why? The locusts came in and the locusts destroyed the crops and He says you're never going to take another drink as long as you live; it's the last for you. Why? Look at verse 3 of Joel, chapter 3, it tells "Because you cast lots for my people and have given a boy away for a harlot and sold a girl for wine that you might drink." It came to the place where a jug of wine was worth more than a girl, they would sell a person for wine. That reminds me of Jerry McCauley, the drunk who took in the middle of the night, crept into a mortuary where his dead two-year old daughter lay in a casket and stole the clothes of her dead body and took them to a bar in exchange for a drink, that's how debauched he became. By the way, later on God saved him and he became a great evangelist. But that's dissipation and that's what it can do.

Ephraim's iniquity in Hosea chapter 7 was linked to wine. Amos writes several places, chapter 2, chapter 4, chapter 6 about terrible debauchery that comes from drunkenness and wine. We know that it can lead to that, so that the question comes - if it can lead to that why would, we put in front of us something that can lead to that when we don't have to? [Habakkuk 2:15](#) "Woe unto him that gives his neighbor drink, that puts his wineskin to him and makes him drunk also, that thou may look on their nakedness. Thou art filled with shame not glory, drink thou also and let thy shame come upon thee, the cup of the Lord's right hand shall be turned unto thee and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory." Boy, what a verse, you do that and God's going to spew on you, God's going to make you drink his cup of Judgment. You get your neighbor drunk and, listen, God's going to spew on you. That's serious.

You see, God knows what it results in, you've seen Skid Row the poor pathetic that walk around in that area, you know what's going on with the stabber and the defenseless people who couldn't defend themselves at all from an attack or reasonably at least. You've seen that kind of life. I grew up, my early years, preaching in missions. Mission after mission down there, I know what it's like and so do you. You know what it leads to. I have to ask myself the question, anything that's that potentially destructive is it wise for me to engage myself in any entertainment of it at all?

So, is it the same, is it necessary, is it the best, is it habit forming, is it potentially destructive? Number six and we'll do the last three real quick. Is it offensive to other Christians? There's another checkpoint. You have to ask yourself this, if I drink, is it going to offend other Christians? You say, "Well, I'm free, I don't want to get into some legalistic bondage, I'm free to do what I want and I can handle it." A guy said to me last week, I can handle it, I don't know what you're so upset about I just like one little shot of scotch in the morning and one little shot at night and I can handle it, it has no affect on me. I say well maybe you can but maybe somebody that sees you do that, can't.

Now listen to this, in I Cor. chapter 8, verse 9, there's a general principle and then it becomes very specific in Romans 14 but [I Cor. 8:9](#), Take heed, he says, lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak. You know, I've had parents come to me and say, "You know, we use to drink and we drank until our kids became teenagers and then we stopped drinking because we saw that they took our example and began to drink and they couldn't handle it." You know a lot of parents have had that happen. The police call them up and say we've got your kid down here; he's drunk we found him laying in the street. You see, you may have the liberty and you may have the moderation, you may have the maturity and the strength but you may set the example for somebody that can't handle it.

Further in Paul's time drunkenness was associated with pagan religion, remember that? Bacchus and Dionysus and all the things we went into last time, drunkenness was associated with pagan religion and when people became Christians just like they didn't want to eat the meat that was offered to the idols anymore, a lot of them didn't want a thing to do with drinking either. And boy when they became Christians one of the things they let go was drinking, they became teatoters. And when Christians would come along and say we have the liberty to drink and they would drink wine, that would be very offensive to those people who had all their life long in paganism associated drinking with the ceremonies of Satan.

Now go to Romans 14 and I'll show you that because that is precisely the issue to what Paul speaks, here were some people who in Rome had been exposed to all this evil drunkenness connected with pagan worship and now they were Christians and some of these other Christians, maybe they were Jewish Christians and they didn't have this background and they didn't have this problem with drinking but boy, some of these Gentile Christians., they had associated the drunkenness and the debauchery, the immorality and the gluttony and the evil and all of the terrible dissipation that went with drunkenness and, when they became Christians they didn't want to have a thing to do with it. And some Christian would come along and say, "Ah, drink up, it's no big deal", they would be deeply offended. And they didn't think they had that freedom because to them that was the old life and now in the new life it ought to be different. And some Christians who would take their liberty to drink in front of those Christians who couldn't have that liberty because of their past, would be very offensive and they'd make that brother stumble and they'd make that brother wounded and grieved and so in Romans 14 Paul says you shouldn't

do that. In verse 13 he says, "Let no man put a stumbling block or occasion to fall in his brothers way". Don't do that it will offend him, further there is another category of people.

There are some people who can't handle that sort of thing. But if you do it they'll say, "Oh, it must be alright" and they'll do it and. become alcoholics, you see? You not only offend some but you make some stumble and become weak. So he says don't do that, don't make people stumble either by doing something they think is so wrong or by doing something that they think they have the right to do and when they do it they become alcoholics.

You know, I've met too many alcoholics, I've seen Jesus Christ change too many alcoholics, I've been to too many Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, I've sat in the back and watched what was going on, I've been to too much of that stuff to ever want to be responsible in my life to ever giving anybody the idea that they can go ahead and drink what they want because I have no control over who's going to follow my example and end up with a disastered life. He says here, "Nothing is unclean of itself", verse 14, that's not the issue, not of itself but if your brother is grieved with your food, verse 15, "Then you're not walking in love". In other words, you're saying, "I don't care what you think, I'm going to drink what I like and you can hang it on your ear". Then you don't love your brother, for verse 17 says, "The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." What you want to cultivate is righteousness, peace and joy not the liberty to eat and drink.

So, verse 19, "Let us therefore follow Vie things that make for peace and things which one may edify another. Just do what's going to build somebody up not what's going to tear them down. Don't do what will make them weak or will make them stumble or will make them offended. "For food", verse 20, "destroy not the work of God." "All things, indeed, are pure but it is evil for that man who eats with offense." It might be okay to drink, there's nothing wrong with wine in and of itself if it's diluted properly and doesn't take away your senses but if you do it is it going to make somebody else offended? So verse 21 calls for total abstinence in certain situations, "it's good neither to eat meat nor drink wine." Don't drink it at all, "if it causes your brother to stumble, be offended or made weak." See? Put it away. He's talking here not about any food but about meat offered to idols.

So he's saying don't eat meat offered to idols and don't drink any wine if it makes somebody offended, somebody stumble. You say, "Boy, you could go through your whole life adjusting to other people". That's the idea, that's what God wants you to do. You know there are people who have come out of an alcoholic background and. it's one of the most wonderful things in the world that Jesus Christ had delivered them, it's one of the most exciting things they could think of that Christ has delivered them., has saved them, has washed them clean and has taken away that evil sin of alcoholism and drunkenness and for a Christian to come along and exalt that liberty in front of them is very offensive. To say nothing of doing it and letting your children see it or some weaker brother and they fall into a terrible, terrible pit.

So, we ask the question, is it the same? And the answer is "no". Is it necessary? And the answer is "no". Is it the best choice? The answer is "no". Is it habit forming? Yes, it can be. Is it potentially destructive? Oh yes. Is it offensive to other Christians? Very often it is, there may be some places in the world where that's not true but in a post prohibition society like ours Christianity has always kind of been associated with non-drinking and surely it's offensive to many people on that basis and to others who would stumble by it and be terribly offended because they see it as their old life.

Let me ask you two more questions quickly. Will it harm my Christian testimony? People say, "Oh if I drink, I can reach out to people, if I drink and do what they do they will accept me." Will it really help your testimony or will it harm it? Well, in [Romans 14:16](#) it says, "Let not your good be evil spoken of". It's very possible that you can be a good guy with a good ministry but if you exercise your liberty to drink to the offense of other people they're going to depreciate your testimony and your ministry and think less of you. I know this for a fact. If I got up in the pulpit and said, "Now I want you to know that I drink, I can handle it." You'd gasp, some of you, some of you would clutch your Scofield Bible and run for the corners. John MacArthur drinks. And every time I got up to speak again, you'd remember he drinks. I wonder if he really has a clear mind. And that would bother a lot of you. Some of you it wouldn't bother at all but some of you it would bother so for no other reason I don't want anybody to be disturbed or bothered and I don't want my Christian testimony to be lessened in any manner at all because I do something. And so I ask myself the question, will others think less of me as a Christian if I do that. And I know in the church circles in Christian circles there are many people who think, who would, think much less of me if I did that. And so I don't want to offend them. What about the world, what about the unsaved?

[I Cor. 10:31](#), very interesting, says, "Wherefore whether you eat or drink, whether you're eating meat offered to idols or drinking wine, or whatever you're doing, do it all to the glory of God." Now how you going to do it to the glory of God? Verse 32, "Give no offense, not to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles nor to the church." I don't want to do what will offend the church, I don't want to take a liberty that's going to offend a whole gob of people and make them think less of my testimony nor do I want to offend the Jews or the Greeks. "Even as I please all in all things not seeking my own profit but the profit of many that they may be saved.." Paul is really saying here, if you want to reach the people who aren't saved, stop drinking and stop eating food that was offered to idols, let them see a difference. Do you get that? Let them see a difference. I don't seek to do what I want to do, I may have the liberty to do a certain thing but I have standards. One: to glorify God, two: to offend absolutely nobody, three: to make sure that I make a difference so people can be saved, make a distinction.

And finally, if you've made it past the first seven checkpoints here's number eight. Ask yourself this, Are you really sure it's right to drink? I mean, are you absolutely sure? Because if you have any conviction about it at all you ought to deal with that. I had a guy come to me last week and he says, "I have beer with the boys, is that wrong?" I said, what do you think? He says, "Well, I

don't think it's wrong but it bothers me." I said, "Do you like being bothered?" "No, I don't like being bothered." I said, "Do you know how to stop being bothered?" "Yea, don't do it." Yea, he says, I don't think it's wrong but it bothers me.

You know something, [Romans 14:23](#) is a helpful verse in that area and I don't have time to go into all of the exegesis of it but just to give you a look at it. It says this, "He that doubts is condemned if he eats because he eats not of faith for whatever is not of faith is a sin." The picture is this; let's take it from the drinking side. You've got a guy here., he came out of a pagan religion and he says, boy, it's wrong to drink that stuff that's all a part of the pagan cults, I'm not going to touch that stuff but some liberated brother says - ah, come on, Charley, don't hang up on that we're free in Christ so go ahead and drink. So he drinks doubting so what happens is he's already in bondage to his legalism he's already kind of a weaker brother, he already can't enjoy his freedom so you force him to do something against his conscious and, all you're going to do is shove him deeper into doubt. Deeper into condemnation, deeper into questioning what he has the liberty to do, and because he didn't do it believing he was free to do it, it became sin to him because he doubts God all the more, he's under more guilt and so forth.

The point is this, if you can't do something with a complete free conscious, believing-with all your heart it's right, don't do it because what it will do is push you deeper into self-condemnation, deeper into self-imposed guilt and that's wrong. And I'll add another thing, when you violate your conscious you're doing a bad thing because the more you violate your conscious the more you sear your conscious with a hot iron and if you keep piling up the scar tissue when God really wants to poke you when there's a sensitive issue, you won't feel it. Conscious is the tool by which God convicts you. And if you violate conscious again and again and again, what's going to happen is when you need it, it's not going to be there. So there are some standards to follow and you have to check yourself on these, take your way through them and ask yourself the same questions I ask myself. Is it the same, is it necessary, is it the best, is it habit forming, is it potentially destructive, is it offensive to other Christians, it is harmful, to my testimony and am I certain that it is right? Can I do it totally believing in faith in God that this is right?

And, beloved, all of this is simply one dimension of walking circumspectly, not as fools but as wise redeeming the time for the days are evil. If you want to walk as a wise Christian this is one way to chart your course. You've got to deal with this issue. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for our time this morning, for giving us the opportunity to discuss and to share on this most important subject. Lord, we would not be legalistic and not be unloving and would not be simply adapting a cultural situation but just dealing with Your truth and Your word, help us to put the pieces together and make a wise decision, in Jesus name Amen.